DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 126 012 SP 010 195

AUTHOR Peters, Richard O.
TITLE Who Runs Our Schools? Social Forces and Philosophies Which Effect Curriculum Development in America's Schools.
PUB DATE Jun 76
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Responsibility; Community; Court Cases; *Curriculum; Decision Making; *Elementary Secondary Education; Federal Legislation; Federal Programs; Financial Support; Governance; Government Role; *Instruction; *Learning; *Policy Formation; Schools; State Departments of Education; State Legislation

ABSTRACT

Who determines the structure and content of children's learning? It is at the federal and state legislative level that the laws-of-the-land are made. Both at the federal and state levels, lawmakers have enacted legislation that has had direct effects upon students and instructional curricula. Federally sponsored programs have had great impact upon curriculum content, instructional materials, and student evaluation. There is also no discounting or minimizing the effect(s) of the courts--federal, state, and local--regarding the present-day character of schools and their curricula. In most states, the departments of education hold sway over teacher training and certification, content of instruction, and pupil attendance, among other things. School boards are empowered with certain legal authority and are charged with overseeing the operation of local level schools. Community pressure groups also affect curriculum decision-making as do special interest groups both within and without the community setting. Finally, since education is a multi-million dollar business, the private enterprise sector of our society determines the content and quality of instruction received by children. (RC)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED1260012

Who Runs Our Schools?

Social Forces and Philosophies Which Effect Curriculum Development in America's Schools

Richard O. Peters, Ed.D.

June 1976

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SP010 195

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Peters in currently Director of an Experimental Schools Program (ESP) project in northern New Hampshire. This project, one of ten such projects serving rural school systems nationwide, is funded by the National Institute of Education, Washington, DC.

Dr. Peters has been a Curriculum Researcher with an ESEA Title III inner city project and has been an advisor to Model Cities Education Task Force.

In June 1967, Dr. Peters began doctoral studies at the Florida State University, Tallahassee, and served as assistant to the director of an NDEA summer institute.

Dr. Peters is not a stranger to the field of curriculum development.

He received his Doctor of Education degree from the University of Rochester (NY) in Curriculum/Instruction and has been a Kindergarten through grade twelve curriculum coordinator; a grades nine through twelve department chairman; an ESEA Title III curriculum researcher; and projects officer for Educational Research Associates. Dr. Peters is currently a member of the Curriculum Advisory Committee of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

What is it - Who is it - that determines the structure and content of children's learning? What are today's social forces which bring pressure directly to bear on instructional program development - at the state, the regional, the county, and the grass roots (local community) level(s) of the American educational enterprise?

For generations in American life the *social benefit theory* of schooling[1] permeated the very fiber of American education. Schools were viewed as social agencies charged with preserving the culture, preparing youth for tomorrow, and perpetuating the governmental and social structure of the nation.[2]

In the 1800's, a new concept of American education took root and was promulgated by Horace Mann; advocation of equality-of-educational opportunity for all - the basic tenent of free public school education.

The *personal benefit theory* of schooling[3], which became a revolutionizing force in American education after the turn of the 20th century, advocated the need for schooling to be learner oriented and geared to individual growth and personal betterment - as well as being structured to meet societal dictates. John Dewey, George Counts and others were proponents of this theory.

---

1 Reference to Walter Doyle, "Educational Opportunity - A National Commitment", Educational Leadership, January 1976.

2 Reference to Henry J. Perkinson, The Possibilities of Error An Approach to Education, 1971.

3 Reference to Doyle, Educational Leadership, 1976.

It was during this period of stress; the time of determining educational direction (be it *social benefit* or *personal benefit*), that the school became a *countervailing socializing agent*[4].

The school, and subsequently the curriculum, became a pawn of those divergent social forces and philosophies which vied for prominence and power. At stake in this struggle was (and still is) the youth of the nation!

Today, America's young are being bussed, fed, taught, tracted, and evaluated by schools - in the name of learning.

Are the schools and their curricula to blame for this state of affairs? In part, yes. YES because professional educators have allowed ambitious and vocal factions within the framework of the social structure to wrest leadership and power at all levels of authority and decision making. Today's educators are more organized than ever before in the history of American education and in their commitment to excellence in schooling, but unfortunately this desire to provide leadership in Education meets with opposition and resentment from the more-entrenched factions. Thus, teacher organizations have become more-demanding and militant in their stand on educational and social issues, political involvement, and contracted services negotiations.

Are the schools and their curricula to blame for this state of affairs? In part, no. NO because other more

---

[4] Reference to Hilda Taba, Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice, 1962.

powerful governmental and social agencies, due to their authority and position within the socio-political structure of the nation, have legislated guidelines and mandated change. What has resulted is a schooling system that reacts to the endless probing and prodding of several interest groups; interest groups which often have ambitions and motives rooted somewhere other than in educational philosophy or curriculum theory. Due to the increasing professional commitment of educators to excellence in schooling, teacher organizations have become more-demanding and militant in their stand on educational and social issues, political involvement, and contracted services negotiations.

I. Federal and State Legislatures

It is at this level of societal organization that the laws-of-the-land are made. Both at the federal and state levels, lawmakers have enacted legislation which has had direct effects upon students and instructional curricula.

At the federal level, ESEA, NDEA and National Science Foundation legislation and programs have had marked effect on curriculum content, instructional materials, and student evaluation/tracting.

At the state level, special title monies have been earmarked for special projects (e.g., the disadvantaged, the handicapped, early childhood education); state departments-of-education have been empowered to streamline and reorganize school systems; and guidelines have been established regarding teacher education and professional certification - as well as promoting community involvement

in the schooling process.

It is an old truism that he who controls the purse strings . . . controls. In the case of the various legislative levels, they not only control the flow of monies into the states, the counties, and to the local levels of the American educational structure but they also determine its expenditure.

II. Federal Agencies

Federally sponsored programs, funded by the U.S. Office of Education and the National Institute of Education (e.g., National Science Foundation, ESEA Title projects, the Experimental Schools Program), as well as the Regional Laboratories and Research/Development Centers, have had great impact upon school curricula. Backed with dollars and the law, federal agencies have led the movement for pre-school education (Headstart; special education; minority education) and continuing education as well as paving the way for non-graded schools and special attention being paid to the disadvantaged and to the handicapped.

In 1976, the National Institute of Education (NIE), Washington, DC, formed a Curriculum Development Task Force to look into Federal involvement in curriculum development and to project federal levels of involvement in Education - for the years to come.

III. The Courts

There is no discounting or minimizing the effect(s) or importance of the courts; federal, state and local, regarding the present-day character of schools and their curricula.

With landmark decisions over the past one hundred years - or more - the courts have decided the constitutionality of local, state and federal laws and in this process have laid the foundation for mandated bussing, minimum age-of-attendance laws, school integration, and the exclusion of the Lord's Prayer for classrooms.

In *Plessey v. Ferguson*, the High Court held that separate-but-equal educational facilities were constitutional. This decision reinforced and further encouraged the concept of school segregation on the basis of race.

In 1923, in *Meyer v. Nebraska*, the Court held that individuals did have a right to education - thus reinforcing Horace Mann's concept of universal (free) public school education. The 1975 decision in *Goss v. Lopez* supported *Meyer* when it was held that students have a right to public education. To a certain degree, the *Rodriguez* case (1973)[5] undermined this concept of universal education when the Court held that education is not among the rights of individuals afforded explicit protection under the Federal Constitution.

Probably the most historic decision of the United States Supreme Court in the field of Education, regarding effects upon public schooling, was the 1954 decision of the Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Kansas); that separate-but-equal facilities are unconstitutional. The Court

---

[5] Reference to *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973).

held that education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments.[6] As a result of *Brown*, the federal courts and governmental agencies became directly involved in the process of school integration; the same often being accomplished only as a result of armed intervention - as in Little Rock, Arkansas - or by forced bussing. *Brown* has led to basic changes in our nation's social structure and has effected attitudes, behaviors, and values.

While holding in *Brown* that education is a function of the several states, the federal government has been incessantly encroaching upon the dominion of states in the field of Education - using as its justification the Constitution and its amendments as well as federal court decisions/rulings.

IV. State Departments of Education

In most states, the commissioners-of-education or superintendents-of-instruction (however titled) and their staffs have great effect upon curriculum content. Backed by state legislatures (in areas of finance and law), departments-of-education hold sway over teacher training and certification, content of instruction, and pupil attendance among other things.

The clout of state departments is visible in the newly emerging Performance Based Teacher Education (PBTE)

---

[6] Reference to the Majority Decision, United States Supreme Court, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 1954.

programs, accountability models, and student basic competencies laws (e.g., California, Michigan, New York, Oregon, and Texas).

V. School Boards

Irregardless of size and location, school boards are empowered with certain legal authority and are charged with overseeing the operation of local level schools; be they located in large cities, surburban communities, or in rural areas.

In a few instances, the courts and the federal government have superceded the authority of school boards and, as in the case with the Boston City School Committee (1976), have mandated the day-to-day operation of the schools.

Whether the decisions be small (e.g., school dance codes and no smoking rules) or large (e.g., the decision of the Dade County Public Schools to state an Equal Employment Opportunity which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race - sex - creed - color - and age), school boards do run America's schools and greatly determine the content and structure of curricula.

VI. Community Pressure Groups

In the view of many[7], there are three levels of curriculum decision making:

1. societal (national, state and local)
2. institutional (the individual school)
3. instructional (the individual teacher).

---

[7] Reference to John Goodlad and Robert H. Anderson.

Certainly the societal level does, indeed, exist and has great impact upon the structure of schools and the content of curricula - as indicated by the plethora of federally funded programs, court rulings, and school board decisions.

To a limited degree, the institutional level has marked effect on curricula and, in turn, has effect upon student attitudes, behaviors, learning, and values. Within restricted parameters the individual school has great say as to how students will learn, how teachers will instruct, and what types of enrichment materials will be employed.

While the teacher remains the keystone to the success of any instructional endeavor, his/her individual input into the totality of the school curriculum is usually confined to that teacher's immediate domain - the classroom. Over the past few years there has been a greater emphasis placed upon direct teacher involvement in the curriculum development process.

As teacher training institutions implement PBTE programs, prepare professionals for accountability, and generally change the emphasis and structure of teacher training to reflect a more-humanistic approach to instruction, people in America's communities will have greater confidence in teachers' abilities to perform education-related tasks other than teaching. Thus, the teacher's scope-of-work will broaden to include more curriculum development related activities.

Only when the classroom teacher becomes more-directly involved in curriculum development and all related tasks (e.g., materials identification and evaluation, evaluation strategies development, pupil progress reporting) will the instructional level of decision making become a reality, a commonplace occurance, and a driving force in curriculum development.

VII. Special Interest Groups

Both within and without the community setting there are factions which continually attempt to wrest power from opposing factions. This is a self-perpetuating phenomenon and an intergral part of the American education enterprise.

There are certain *targets* which special interest factions or groups aim for - among them being:

1. legislative bodies and related committees (federal, state and local).
2. the courts (federal, state and county).
3. state boards-of-education.
4. state department-of-education.
5. school boards.
6. community school advisory boards or committees.

At the local level today, special interests can find a newly emerging vehicle; a sounding board - if you wish, through which they can expound their views and *flex their muscles*. This vehicle is the community school advisory

board or council. Promoted by the federal government (e.g., Model Cities advisory boards, Experimental Schools Program advisory boards, and title money craft and advisory committees), the advisory board or council is fast becoming an intricate part of the local school system power structure; that is, the school board, the system administration, and the advisory boards/councils.

VIII. Business/Industry

Education is a multi-million dollar business in America. To a great degree, the private enterprise sector of our society determines the content and quality of instruction received by children.

With the advent of federally funded title projects (provided for under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and other federal legislation) there suddenly arose a need for more and better materials. This being the time of Sputnik and the spacerace mania, a great emphasis was placed on new technology, new methods (e.g., the scientific approach, inquiry method) and new instructional materials. Non-educational corporations such as Westinghouse, Xerox and Rayethon started educational materials divisions and soon marketed the *new* materials.

The *new* materials resulted in the need for *new* mathematics, *new* sciences, *new* social studies, etc. The combination of the *new* programs and the *new* materials drastically change the curriculum content and structure.

In addition, the newly emerging emphasis on accountability and empirical (objective) evaluation has resulted in the development of new standardized and criterion reference tests by CTB/McGraw-Hill, Educational Testing Service (ETS) and others.